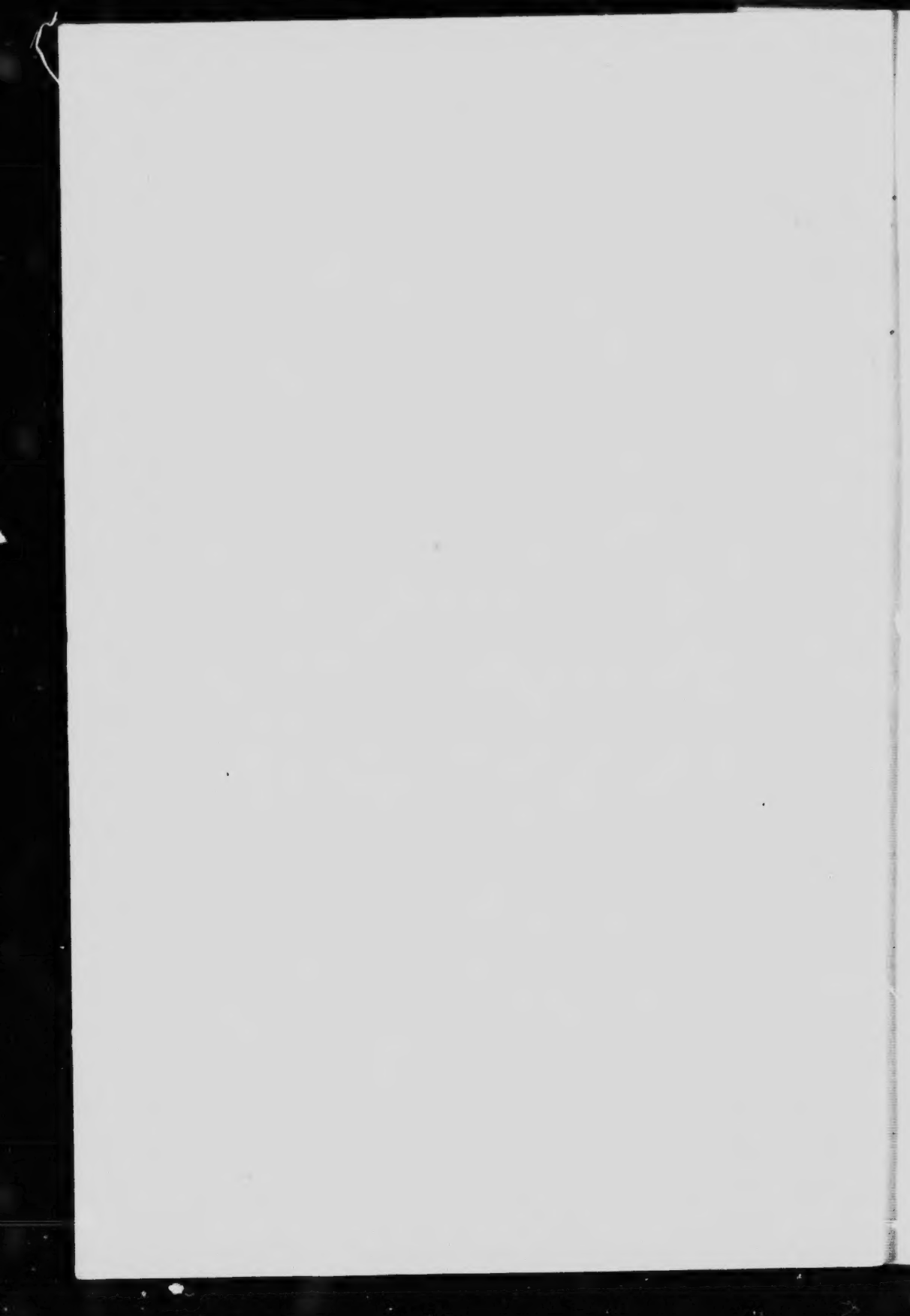


Indian and
Other Tales

M. L. HOPE

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By M. L. HOPE

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INDIAN AND OTHER TALES



INDIAN AND OTHER TALES

O beautiful wind of the West,
In your wand'rings o'er land and sea,
What have you seen in your quest?
Come, tell your story to me.

In the isles of the southern seas,
Where the crystal-clear ocean a melody sang
To the beautiful kauri trees,
I wandered the summer day through,
In the forest's dappled shade,
Where the graceful fern-tree bowed its head
To woo the Maori maid.
A nymph of the woods was she
In her kiwi mantle brown;
And the fern-tree wooed her with tender grace
From dawn till the sun went down;
But a Maori chieftain came
In the glory of life's young morn,
And the maiden forsook her mystic love,
Leaving it sad and forlorn.
But the tui-bird saw its grief,
And in loving sympathy
Built her beautiful, woven nest
In the heart of the lonely tree.

And when its liquid notes echoed the woodland
through,
The fern-tree lifted its drooping head
And was fresh as the morning dew;
So I left them in their joy—the youth and his fairy
bride,
The tree with its nest of callow birds—
And I crossed the ocean tide.

In the early morn I came to a land where the orchards
were white
With their wealth of apple blossoms, and bathed in the
spring sunlight;
There I found a winding road with banks where the
wild-flowers grew,
And through a vista of blossoming trees the sea came
into view,
As it sparkled in the sun and kissed the golden shore,
Then laughed aloud in its mirth and ran back to the sea
once more.

And again I wandered on, until in the twilight dim
I came where the scent of the wattle seemed the incense
to Nature's hymn,
For a brooding peace lay o'er land and sea
As I sank to rest in a blue gu n-tree,
And when I awoke in the dawn, the dew lay on vine-
yards green,

Where they nestled in valleys of red-hued loam;
And a river whose fount was a cascade clear,
Which burst from the brow of a mountain near,
Wended its way through the verdant land,
Till it reached at last the ocean strand,
Where it lost itself in the waters deep,
And only the mermaids saw it leap
With joy, as it reached the Garden of Sleep.

And still I wandered on until I came to tropical seas,
Where the odors of spices were wafted afar by every
 passing breeze;
And in the pearly light of the coming day
I saw the feathery bamboo groves, where the elephant
 loves to stray;
I heard his mighty trump, as he waked from his dream,
And the sound of women's voices as they wended their
 way to the stream;
A laughing, chattering throng, they passed me on their
 way
To bathe in the limpid waters, ere the sun held his
 sovereign sway.
I followed a Purple Emperor to the cinnamon gardens
 near,
Then chased a laughing rickshaw boy, and whispered
 in his ear;
What the secret was I may not tell,
But the rickshaw boy seemed to know it well.

Then I left behind me this island fair,
With its wondrous charm and fragrant air,
And ere night had fallen had crossed the sea,
And come to the land of the banyan tree,
Where nature is wrapped in mystery deep,
And the gods in the cups of the Lotus-flower sleep;
And even my spirit felt its spell,
For I scarcely breathed as the twilight fell;
And when o'er the palm-trees and temples fair
The crescent moon hung in the evening air,
And from shadowy doorways and wayside shrines near
The chant of the Koran fell on my ear;
Still more did its mystery my spirit fill,
For I felt that I only could breathe and be still.

And so on to the Isles of the West I roam,
Which the hearts of the exiles ever call home;
And I think that the primrose and hare-bells blue
Are emblems of hearts that are ever true,
And the shamrock doth also with elfin grace
Claim for itself in my heart a place;
So I whisper them each that no fairer land
Have I found in my wanderings from strand to strand;
They each have their charm and magic spell,
And loving hearts in each one doth dwell.

It was night and the tired villagers were wrapped in
sleep;
Only within her lonely hut did a mother her vigil keep.
All day she had toiled and labored, carrying bricks and
stone,
While her child lay sick with fever, and uttered his
weary moan.
Oft she had paused in her work, and in soft, caressing
tone
Had soothed his plaintive crying, then gone back to
her work alone,
And now, though tired and weary, and heavy her eyes
with sleep,
She sat and nursed her baby with a mother love true
and deep;
And when with a last little cry he turned in her arms
and was still,
She knew that no more would his baby love the place
in her hard life fill.
She was only a coolie mother, but her heart was heavy
with pain,
For she knew that she never would clasp her child in
her lonely arms again.
What had mattered the daily toil in the heat of the
burning sun,
When she knew that she had her little one to caress
when the day was done?
To you he was only a coolie child with his baby limbs
dimpled and bare,
But now he is one of those favored ones who are safe
in their Saviour's care.

The highway was hot and dusty, oppressive the air;
The sun on the tired bullocks beat down with pitiless
glare.

Mere living skeletons were they, their worn-out hides
scarce covering their aching bones;

Hunger and thirst were their daily lot, while many a
cruel blow

Forced them to drag their heavy load, though weary
their gait and slow;

The look in their eyes was pitiful, so full of helpless
pain,

While ever the cruel driver showered his blows like
rain.

Have ye no heart, ye men of the East, that ye treat
dumb creatures so?

Does it help you to bear your own weary lot to add to
their tale of woe?

Bruised and maim, half-blind, and halt, you drive
them: until they drop!

Oh, had I the power I would wield it, such cruelty to
stop;

When I see you prod them with pointed stick, my soul
cries in answering pain;

Oh, why will you treat your oxen so, and give to your
land this stain?

Tired out with the heat and the burden of day,
And the miles I have walked 'neath the sun's fierce ray,
I think with delight of the bungalow dim,
And how I shall fill my long glass to the brim;
But when I arrive all is empty and bare,
The khansamah has gone to his evening prayer.

I think I will rest on the charpoi awhile,
But the mosquitoes turn out in most welcoming style;
I then in despair do betake me outside,
Still to find I am helpless to stem their fierce tide.
But wait, there's still balm for my weary soul—
I take out my pipe and fill up the bowl,
And for a few moments I have a respite,
But, oh, I'd be glad of my supper to-night.

But presently cometh mine host of the inn,
And soon from the murghi's there issues a din,
The heartless khansamah he cares not a jot,
The dechie is here, but the murghi is not.
And though it is tough, and not cooked with great care,
I am not in a mood to complain of my fare.

You may think that travelling hath its delights,
But wait till you've spent a few weary nights
In a dak-bungalow, empty and bare,
With no punka coolie to answer your prayer,
Then I'm sure you'll agree that a pleasanter lot
Is to live in a place where dak-bungalows are not.

Again a dak-bungalow is the theme of my lay,
But now it is cool, and the close of the day
Finds me seated outside in my long-armed chair,
My report to the Burra Sahib now to prepare,
But, oh, ye great gods, what a discordant din
Doth break on the peace and contentment within!
A horde of wild monkeys the compound invade,
Of every color and age and grade.

A venerable sage cometh close to my chair
As though he intended my labors to share.
But his better-half thinks she has by far the best right
To my paper and pens, should I guard them less tight;
So she sends him off flying with a howl of pain,
Then comes back and watches my efforts again;
Meanwhile, the rest of the tribe chatter and grin,
Until I think I am being turned outside in.

Oh, where are my dreams of peace and delight—
A peg and a smoke in the cool of the night?
Their noise and their chatter drive all peace away,
And make we feel minded those monkeys to slay;
But when I start up and with a stone take a shot,
The compound is bare, and the monkeys have got;
They have vanished away like the mist in the sun;
And, well, after all, they were only in fun.

It was May in the dear old homeland,
 And the woods and valleys green
 Were a vision of radiant beauty,
 For summer now reigned as queen.
 The lark sang high in the heavens,
 Filling the air with song,
 And the thrush with its liquid melody
 Was glad as the day was long.
 The brooks through the meadows rippled,
 Reflecting the sun's bright ray;
 And the whole earth joined in singing
 To the summer a welcoming lay.

May, in an Eastern city, under burning skies,
 Where many a weary exile for the dear old homeland
 cries;
 Only those know the longing and pain
 Who have spent long years on the sun-dried plain,
 Whom days of toil under a pitiless sun
 Have robbed of hope ere the race was won.
 Those who each year are free to go
 To the hills where the cooling breezes blow;
 Where they see afar off the snow-clad peaks,
 And nature in all her beauty speaks,
 Of the weary striving know but the least,
 For they see but the bright side of life in the East.

I.

'Twas the hush of the early dawn,
Ere nature had wakened from sleep;
The stars still shone in the opal sky,
And deep called unto deep,
"Where is the monarch of day—
Why tarrieth he so long?
Knoweth he not that his bride, the Morn,
Waiteth to greet him with song?"

II.

And e'en as the clarion cry
Rang out from shore to shore,
The waves from their deep caves leapt
With a mighty roar.
The sea-birds wakened from sleep
And circled the air;
The wild beasts ceased hunting their prey,
And sought their lair.

III.

The mountains caught up the cry
And echoed it afar,
While dim in the East became
The morning star.

The hills and the valleys awoke,
And with joyous strain
The birds of the woodlands broke
Into song again.

IV.

And now the full glory of day
Reigned over earth and sea,
And morn in her mantle fair
Was glad as a bride could be;
For night had faded away;
And the glorious light of the sun
Had filled all her being with joy
And made her and the Sun-king one.

I.

O land of sunshine and shadows,
Fair land of the glowing East,
Where many a hope lies buried
In graves we expect the least;
And yet with what power hath thy magic enthralled,
For we long to return when the East hath called.

II.

What witchery lies in thy moonlight,
With its shadows cut clear and fine,
By the moon which is hung in the heavens
Like a silver lamp in a shrine;
By the stars which shine out in their radiance with a
lustre, undimmed and bright,
The day hath its wealth of beauty, but what can excel
the night!

III.

Is there aught can exceed the splendor
Of the lake in the moonlight clear,
When mirrored therein are the stately palms
And the pagoda's fantastic tier.
No sound breaks the exquisite silence but the call of
the white-faced owl,
Or the cry of the distant jackal as he goes on his
nightly prowl.

IV.

There flits past a shadowy form,
But no sound is heard on the midnight air;
'Tis a recluse going to pay his vows in the white-
domed temple near,

And when the first blush of dawn doth color the
Eastern sky

The watchman calleth the faithful to prayer,
With his solemn mysterious cry.

v.

And now hath the night departed,
With its silence and shadows deep,
And the weary, toiling worker hath waked from his
dreamless sleep,

For the sun now reigns in the heavens, filling the world
with light,

And with its first beams we say farewell,
Farewell to the dreams of night.

i.

"What meaneth this black magic?" the gharri-wallah
cried,

When he saw the horseless car go forth with only a man
inside,

And he sat and planned what rupees he would reap
When the magic failed or went to sleep.

Double fare, at least, he thought,
He'd demand from those whom his services sought;

But, alas, for his dreams of wealth that day,
The magical car had come to stay.

II.

But what of the poor old bhisti's, whose work had been
so far

To water with their musick the track of the horseless
car?

When they saw the huge water-tank go on its way,
And with showers of water the dust fiend lay;

"This can never last," they wisely cried,
As they sat in a line on the car track side;

"And when it fails it will be our day,
We'll ask for our musicks quite double pay;
Instead of a pice our charge shall be,
An anna at least," and they chuckled with glee;
But they in their turn were doomed to dismay,
For the tank had likewise come to stay.

So to the Rea Road away they hied,
And to water it well is now their pride;
When the sahibs drive there in the cool of the day,
They see them at work in the old-time way.

A little hill-boy was Buncee, a chokra trusty and true;
In the days when I was new to the East
He taught me more than he knew;
"Ghush munta, sahib," said he; I doubtfully shook my
head;
"Ghush na munta," in scandalized tones, but I knew
not what he said.
Then he straightened himself against the wall, and
went through a pantomime show
Of bathing. I smiled and nodded assent;
It was cute of the boy, you know.

He was eager to save all the pice he could, that when
the season was o'er,
And the sahibs all left and went down to the plains
He would have of rupees a store.
So I became his banker, and locked them away in my
case,
And told him he now must be doubly sure to take every
care of the place.
I returned one day in the midst of the rains, the inner
door was locked,
And when I tried the outer one, I found that it was
blocked;
So I forced my way into the room, and there the
youngster lay,
Stretched out before the outer door, with never a word
to say.

He had lighted the charcoal-burner to air the chill,
damp room,
Then lain down to guard the treasure, unheeding the
deadly fume.
We carried him out and brought him to, and I tell you
I was glad,
For I'd grown attached to the chokra, the true little
Indian lad.

A peon brought me a chit one day;
I said in pretended dismay,
"I have no money to pay this bill, the man can go
away;"
"But, sahib," said Buncee quickly, "there are my
rupees, you know."
Do you wonder I liked the youngster, or that I valued
him so?
And oft in the gloaming I sit and think, and memory
backward flies;
For many there be with hearts as true in that land
under Eastern skies.

GLOSSARY

- No. 1. New Zealand, Tasmania, Australia, Ceylon,
India.
- Page 1. British Isles.
- Page 7. Khansamah—Head table man.
Charpoi—Native-made bedstead.
Murghi—A chicken.
Chie—Cooking-pot.
Dak-bungalow—Post-house.
- Page 8. Burra Sahib—Head of a firm.
Compound—Grounds attached to a house or
building.
Peg—A whiskey and soda.
- Page 14. Gharri Wallah—Cab driver.
Bhisti—Water-carrier.
Musick—Goatskin of water.
Pice—Equal to a farthing.
Anna—Equal to a penny.
- Page 16. Chokra—Boy.
Ghush munta—Bath want.
Ghush na munta—Bath not want.
Peon—Messenger.
Chit—Anything contained in an envelope,
usually meaning a letter.